

# The Formerly Famous Town of Tecumseh, Shawnee County, Kansas

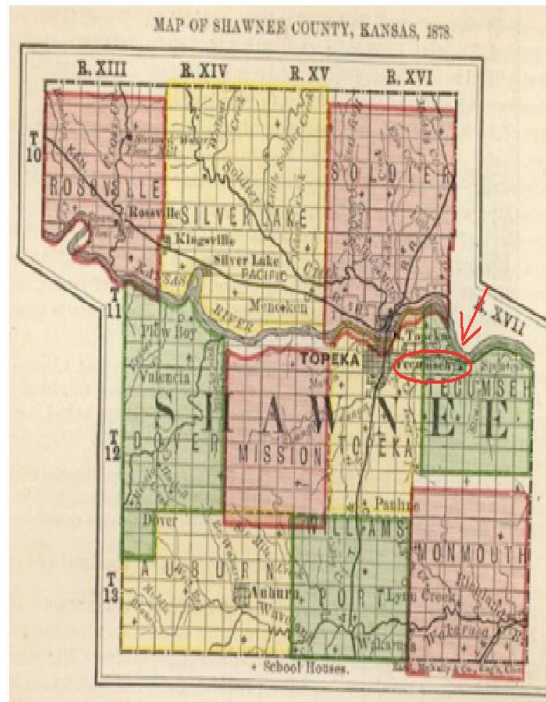


Figure 1: Map of Shawnee County in 1878 that shows location of Tecumseh.

Source: <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1878/images/shawnee.jpg>

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The community of Tecumseh is located in Shawnee County, Kansas on the fringes of the state capital, Topeka. In the mid 1850s, proslavery settlers from Missouri founded the town. The first post office was established on March 3, 1855.<sup>1</sup> Because of Tecumseh's close location to Topeka, and the politics of its founders, it was involved in much of the chaos that enveloped Kansas during its bloody territorial years.

In the aftermath of the Pottawatomie Massacre, in which John Brown's brigade brutally murdered proslavery sympathizers, the Tecumseh prison was selected to house the murder suspects. Evidence of this, can be found in two letters addressed to the Reverend Samuel Adair in 1856. On June 14th, H.H. Williams and other suspects, including John Brown, wrote a letter describing John Brown's mental health, lawyer costs, and the conditions of the prison. They had "been well treated all the way so far and are in very good quarters as of present."<sup>2</sup> E.L. Partridge wrote the second letter on December 28, 1856 after visiting her husband at the prison in Tecumseh. Her account differs from H.H. Williams' account of the prison, saying her husband's face is swelling and "the prison is far from being comfortable."<sup>3</sup> An article published in Tecumseh's *The Kansas Settler* newspaper on February 17, 1858 was entitled "The Free State Prisoners of 1856: Important Decision." The article discusses the damages wrought by the Massacre, retributions for the victims and a list of the over forty prisoners and their charges.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 2: An 1859 lithograph depicting the town of Tecumseh. Source: [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org)**

After Kansas entered the union and the Civil War ended, Tecumseh continued to survive. The 1870 Agricultural Census provides a glimpse of the Tecumseh economy during this period. According to the Census, as of June 1, 1870, Tecumseh boasted: 8,828 acres of improved land, farms valued at \$605,000 (equal to over ten million dollars in 2010), total annual wages of \$16,097, and total livestock valued at \$109,294 (equal to approximately 1.8 million dollars in 2010).<sup>5</sup> That spring, farmers had collected 5,402 bushels of wheat, among other harvests.<sup>6</sup>

It is apparent that the Tecumseh economy was alive and well in 1870, but the town was much more than just numbers on paper. It was populated with peoples of diverse backgrounds. In the Census of 1870, most people had not listed their birthplace as Kansas, but listed it as another

state, such as Indiana or Illinois, or in some cases another country.<sup>7</sup> Two examples are Henry Schatt and Charles Basher.<sup>8</sup> Viewing their census records gives a glimpse into their lives in 1870.

Henry Schatt was a shoe and boot maker. He invested \$100 into his business, spent \$245 on his supplies, and made a \$700 profit by selling boots, shoes and repairs during eight months of operation.<sup>9</sup> He was forty-three in 1870 and married to thirty-seven year old Catherine. They had four children: fourteen-year-old Caroline, nineteen-year-old William, a seven-year-old daughter whose name was indistinguishable, and five-year old Mary.<sup>10</sup> Henry and Catherine were both from Hesse, a city in present-day Germany, the three oldest children were born in Indiana, and the youngest, Mary, was born in Kentucky.<sup>11</sup>

Another example of a foreign immigrant seeking success in Tecumseh was Charles Basher, a blacksmith and wagon maker. In 1870, he invested \$1000 into his company over the past year, paid \$800 in wages to other workers, and spent \$920 on supplies. He made a \$1500 profit off horseshoeing, reshaping, and the sales of wagons and twenty cultivators.<sup>12</sup> Charles was forty-five and originally from Saxony, located in present day Germany.<sup>13</sup>

By 1880, the Tecumseh economy had changed. Instead of people farming and keeping shop, many residents were working in a mill or on the railroad.<sup>14</sup> Many people also left Tecumseh, following the railroad and the jobs it produced, marking the beginning of the town's decline. Tecumseh was unable to compete with the rapidly growing city of Topeka, which was chosen as the state capital, which led to its demise. Today Tecumseh is unincorporated but still houses inhabitants, the Tecumseh United Methodist Church, two elementary schools and a post

office.<sup>15 16 17</sup> The community has become enrobed by the urban sprawl of Topeka, becoming a suburb to the capital rather than an independent community. However, the history of Tecumseh, and the unique role the town played in the territorial wars of Kansas, remains to never be forgotten.

- <sup>1</sup> “Kansas Post Offices 1828-1961”, (accessed September 18, 2011), [http://www.kshs.org/geog/geog\\_postoffices/search/placename:tecumseh/county:/begyr:/endyr:/submit:SEARCH](http://www.kshs.org/geog/geog_postoffices/search/placename:tecumseh/county:/begyr:/endyr:/submit:SEARCH).
- <sup>2</sup> H.H. Williams, “Letter, H.H. Williams and others, to Rev. Sir [Samuel Adair]”, June 14, 1856, Territorial Kansas Online, (accessed September 16, 2011), [http://www.territorialkansasonline.org/~imlskto/cgi-bin/index.php?SCREEN=show\\_document&document\\_id=100323&FROM\\_PAGE=](http://www.territorialkansasonline.org/~imlskto/cgi-bin/index.php?SCREEN=show_document&document_id=100323&FROM_PAGE=).
- <sup>3</sup> E.L. Partridge, “Letter, E.L. [Mrs. William] Partridge to Mr. [Samuel] Adair”, December 28, 1856, Territorial Kansas Online, (accessed September 16, 2011), [http://www.territorialkansasonline.org/~imlskto/cgi-bin/index.php?SCREEN=show\\_document&document\\_id=100328&FROM\\_PAGE=](http://www.territorialkansasonline.org/~imlskto/cgi-bin/index.php?SCREEN=show_document&document_id=100328&FROM_PAGE=).
- <sup>4</sup> Unknown Author, “The Free State Prisoners of 1856: Important Decision”, *The Kansas Settler*, February 17, 1858 roll 228, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.
- <sup>5</sup> “The Inflation Calculator”, accessed on September 18, 2011, <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Kansas Agricultural Census: Industry and Agriculture Statistics, 1870, Tecumseh, Shawnee County, Kansas, roll K-21 Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.
- <sup>7</sup> Kansas Population Census, 1870, Tecumseh, Shawnee County, Kansas, roll K-18, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Kansas Agricultural Census: Industry and Agriculture Statistics, 1870, Tecumseh, Shawnee County, Kansas, roll K-21, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.
- <sup>10</sup> Kansas Population Census, 1870, Tecumseh, Shawnee County, Kansas, roll K-18, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Kansas Agricultural Census: Industry and Agriculture Statistics, 1870, Tecumseh, Shawnee County, Kansas, roll K-21, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.
- <sup>13</sup> Kansas Population Census, 1870, Tecumseh, Shawnee County, Kansas, roll K-18, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.
- <sup>14</sup> Kansas Population Census, 1880, Tecumseh, Shawnee County, Kansas, roll K-57, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.
- <sup>15</sup> Tecumseh United Methodist Church, (accessed on September 18, 2011), <http://tecumsehumc.com/>.
- <sup>16</sup> “Schools”, Shawnee Heights USD 450, (accessed September 18, 2011), <http://www.usd450.net/schools.cfm>.
- <sup>17</sup> “Post Office Locations”, United States Postal Service, (accessed on September 18, 2011), [http://usps.whitepages.com/post\\_office/KS/TECUMSEH](http://usps.whitepages.com/post_office/KS/TECUMSEH).  
Figure 1.1: “Shawnee County”, KSGenweb Digital Library, (accessed on September 9, 2011), <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1878/images/shawnee.jpg>